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## Party brands and voting

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### ABSTRACT

Some scholars argue that Western societies have seen a decreasing impact of voting behavior based on cleavages and party identifications. Equally, issue ownership voting is seemingly not increasing its relevance by filling this gap. From this departure we seek out an alternative variable by posing the question: Do party brands influence voting behavior? Currently, we do not know because the two research fields of voting behavior and party brands are currently not explicitly linked. Traditionally, the study of voting behavior has gained powerful insights from concepts such as cleavage structure, party identification and issue ownership. On the other hand, the study of political brands has illuminated how people employ brands in their identity construction and how voters use party brands to differentiate between political parties. In this light, the article first distinguishes the brand concept from related heuristics and voting models. Next, the article measures the brand value of Danish parties by utilizing a representative association analysis. Finally, this measure is used to conduct the very first empirical analysis of a party brand's effect on voting behavior. Overall, the primary finding demonstrates that political brand value (PBV) has an effect on voting behavior—also when a number of other relevant explanatory variables are held constant.

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Do party brands influence voting behavior? Currently, we do not know because the research fields of voting behavior and party brands are not explicitly linked. Traditionally, the field of *voting behavior* has gained powerful insights from concepts such as cleavage structure (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), party identification (Campbell et al., 1960) and issue ownership (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996). On the other hand, the field of *political brands* has illustrated, for example, how a brand is used by voters to differentiate between political parties (Scammell, 2007; Smith and French, 2009), project a certain identity (Smith, 2009), or establish brand loyalty (Needham, 2005; Phipps et al., 2010). Against this background, this article aims to bring together the two fields of voting behavior and

political brands to examine whether a party brand influences a voter's propensity to vote for that particular party. In this way we investigate whether it is possible and productive to conceptually and empirically integrate the political brand concept within the massive literature on voting behavior.

Overall, this article finds that there is a conceptual and empirical void to be filled by the political brand. On a conceptual level we demonstrate, that the political brand help voters internalize public sentiments circulating in the political sphere, by working as a heuristic which push them in the direction of parties, which currently have an aura of momentum or likeability. On an empirical level, we find support for a brand effect on voter decision-making. Based on a representative sample of Danish voters, we show that the political brand of different parties appears to have an effect on voting behavior—also after a number of other relevant explanatory variables from political science (such as cleavage structure, party identification and issue ownership) are held constant.

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To present this case, the article is divided into five steps. First, we motivate our focus on the political brand in light of recent theoretical and empirical developments. Second, we conceptualize the political brand. Specifically, this article employs a voter centric conception of the political brand, focusing on how associations constitute the brands of political parties in the minds of voters. As such, we frame the political brand concept as a heuristic voters use on Election Day. A heuristic distinct from related ones we typically see in political science. Third, we briefly situate the political brand concept in relation to the main theories of voting behavior to analytically separate a brand optic from constructs such as cleavage structure, party identification and issue ownership. Fourth, we describe the association method, which constitutes the brand measurement by looking at the study's context, data and operationalization. Fifth, we use a representative, two wave panel survey to measure the political brands of Danish parties, along with traditional political science variables, in order to examine whether a party brand influences voting behavior. Finally, the article summarizes the results and outlines future directions for the study of political brands.

### 1. On the need for a political brand concept in voting behavior

Brands are vital to people. They are able to create signals, both emotionally and functionally, that can ease the decision-making process when a person is confronted with a complex bundle of alternatives (e.g. Keller, 1993). Although the importance of brands was originally established in marketing research, its logic has diffused to many areas of society (Marsh and Fawcett, 2011); in particular, during the last two decades, the study of brands in politics has evolved in regards to parties (Harrop, 1990; Schneider, 2004; French and Smith, 2010), party leaders (Lock and Harris, 2001; Needham, 2005) and party campaigns (Kavanagh, 1995).

One explanation for the growing interest in political brands is the changing nature of post-war Western democracies. The increase in valence issues (Thomassen, 2005), voter volatility (Dalton, 2000, 2012) and practices of political marketing strategy among parties (Hopkin and Paolucci, 1999; Kavanagh, 1995; Nielsen, 2012; Scammell, 2007) have all paved the way for analyzing politics through the lens of brands (Smith and French, 2009; Smith and Speed, 2011). Moreover, some scholars argue that traditional grand variables in voting behavior are slowly decreasing in explanatory power as cleavages have weakened following the resolution of many social conflicts (e.g. Berglund et al., 2005). Likewise, party identification has gradually eroded in many Western countries, partly because people today are more individualized and educated (Clarke and Stewart, 1998), which makes it germane to proclaim that: "*As partisanship in the electorate has weakened, it stands to reason that voters would have to substitute other factors in their decision-making process*" (Dalton et al., 2000: 49). Also a more recent concept designated to fill this lacuna, such as issue ownership voting, seems to be stagnating rather than increasing, especially in a number of European countries (see Aardal

and Van Wijnjen, 2005; Smith, 2005). Even so, all these traditional variables are of course still very crucial to the study of voting behavior, but party brands can potentially provide an alternative venue for explaining contemporary voting behavior.

However, if one accepts that there is room for an alternative perspective, the introduction of a brand concept in a political context, naturally raises the broader question of whether marketing concepts are commensurable with politics. Put bluntly: Can buying washing powder be compared to voting for a party? In many cases the short answer is no. The differences are obvious between the world of politics and the world of business. In particular, when it comes to voters facing a single transaction (i.e. Election Day) instead of multiple encounters, an intangible product instead of a tangible product, and no explicit price tags instead of clear-cut prices (Johansen, 2012; Lock and Harris, 1996). In this light we shall be careful when transferring concepts from marketing to politics.

Nevertheless, Needham (2005: 347) and other political scientists (e.g. Harrop, 1990; Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 2007; Schneider, 2004) have argued that ideas from marketing such as the brand concept can be applied when recognizing the particularities of politics. In practice, the focus should be on service marketing rather than product marketing. A service (i.e. an operation at a hospital) is sold on trust, not a random promotion campaign of certain product features of washing powder. The trustworthiness of the service must be gained year round (i.e. the hospital tells their patients about their rate of success when making surgeries), since we cannot touch the offering in the moment of purchase. Political offerings are thus more similar to services since they are based on a promise to be delivered in the future. In this regard, it is relevant that many marketing scholars argue that a valuable brand is more important for organizations providing a service, in contrast to a product (e.g. Berry, 2000), simply because a service, for instance, the political promise to deliver better health care is often fast-changing, complex, intangible and almost impossible to evaluate before it is consumed. In brief, the current brand status of parties can reduce these insecurities and reassure people of their political choice. By this token there seems to be enough potential, and perhaps even an explanatory need, for a brand concept in the study of short term explanations of voting behavior.

### 2. The political brand as an explanatory force: a new voter heuristic

Having argued that brands can be a part of voting behavior research, we are now left with the much more difficult task: Laying out how the explanatory logic of political brands fits into the larger scheme of voting behavior research. In the following, we argue that a political brand can be understood as a voter heuristic: a helping hand in a complex political world. Yet, unlike other such heuristics, the brand heuristic is based on learning. That is, the brand voter is considered an unmotivated learner, who picks up the public sentiments that surrounds different parties. In this regard, he has no special allegiance to just one party,

but simply looks at which party has the most appealing aura at the moment.

We lay out this theoretical argument in three steps. First, we explain why we select one part of the brand concept as our point of departure (the voter centric political brand perspective), then we outline how a political brand can be utilized as heuristic, and finally we contrast this brand heuristic with other prevalent voter short cuts in political science.

### 2.1. The political brand concept

A minimal definition of a political brand reads: “*political representations that are located in a pattern, which can be identified and differentiated from other political representations*” (Nielsen, 2013). This definition is inspired by marketing research (e.g. *Dictionary of Marketing Terms*, 1995: 224). However, even with this definition as a starting point, there are still many different ways one may go on to apply the political brand concept. Accordingly, the study of political brands has in recent years expanded in many directions within the field of political marketing. Numerous contributions drawing on a variety of *epistemological foundations* have been proposed, ranging from origins in anthropology (Dermoddy and Scullion, 2001; Phipps et al., 2010), psychology (French and Smith, 2010) or economics (Harris and Lock, 2001). Furthermore, the political brand concept is applied to a host of *research objects*, examining for example citizens, voters, leaders, members, communities, communications, campaigns, policies, social groups, parties, NGOs, public sector organizations, nations and other entities, actors or processes (e.g. Marsh and Fawcett, 2011; Phipps et al., 2010; Smith and French, 2009).

As this short description shows, there is not just one canonical interpretation of what a political brand is or what empirical phenomena it applies to. We will thus examine only one part of the brand concept, the *voter centric political brand perspective* (Nielsen, in press; Smith, 2009; French and Smith, 2010). There are two reasons for singling out this perspective. First, this perspective is utilized in both product and service marketing. Consequently, its foundation is prepared for the complexities of the political setting, as outlined above. Second, this perspective directly examines the interaction between voters and parties, in contrast to, for example, a brand community perspective rooted in anthropology, which has gained insight on voters’ social consumption (Phipps et al., 2010) or a manager-driven approach rooted in economy that unpacks how party strategists build a valuable brand (Harris and Lock, 2001).

### 2.2. The voter centric political brand as a heuristic

The voter centric brand perspective revolves around the notion, that brands are represented in memory as an associative network (Raaijmakers and Shiffrin, 1981; Srull, 1981; Srull and Wyer, 1989). This network is composed of (i) a central node denoting the name of the brand and (ii) a number of specific features that have become associated with this concept through learning (Keller, 1993; French and Smith, 2010). The activation of a party brand in

memory triggers a number of linked associations through a process called spreading activation (Collins and Loftus, 1975). These associations could consist of experiences, feelings, images, issues, sentiments or symbols.

The party name “Democrats” in the United States could bring to mind an experience of campaign momentum, leading to the latest policy proposals, and then spark the term liberal or some commentators’ assessment of the party’s overall performance. As such, the voter centric political brand perspective highlights the *public sentiments* surrounding a political party in the minds of voters, defined as the multi-sensory imagery a voter picks up about the current status of a party. During the 2010 election in the United Kingdom, for example, a host of positive associations floated around the Conservatives and David Cameron as a cool and competent political enterprise. The opposite was the case for Labor and Gordon Brown despite many voters supported a host of Labor’s policies (see Smith and French, 2011: 473–475).

The associations that end up in the associative network are not the product of an intensive search. The voter merely stockpiles information fragments in memory about each party. Nor is it the result of a systematic search, centering on a specific type of information. Rather, associations are gathered from the atmospheres that voters’ sense is surrounding various parties (French and Smith, 2010; Nielsen, in press; Schneider, 2004; Smith and French, 2011). This information search makes the brand voter especially open to changes in public sentiments: political trends and sudden shifts in momentum. Even in the absence of shifts in policy performance.

How does this associative network then potentially affect voting? When the political brand has been activated in the mind of a voter, then parts of the associations stored in long-term memory about the party will randomly be directed to the working memory with an overrepresentation of the most recent and important associations (for a review of this mechanism see Zaller and Feldman, 1992: 586f). Accordingly, when voters need to make a political decision involving a party (e.g. vote), they will use the overall status drawn from these associations as a heuristic. This heuristic acts as a predisposition that influences the judgment of voters. The process driving this particular mechanism can be termed *political brand value*: the value added (or subtracted) to a political entity by associating it with a certain brand name. Thus, political brand value concerns how much more desirable (or undesirable) a political offering will be for the individual voter by attaching the brand name to that offering. This leads to the first hypothesis:

*H1. Higher (or lower) levels of political brand value attached to a party will manifest in a higher (or lower) propensity to vote for the same party.*

### 2.3. Contrasting the voter centric political brand with other heuristics

Heuristics have been explaining voting behavior in political science for many years. These heuristics have had many shapes and sizes: a party cue (Kam, 2005; Lodge and Hamill, 1986), the motivated reasoners’ “How do I feel”

heuristic (Lodge and Taber, 2000), a running tally (Fiorina, 1981), an impression-driven candidate evaluation (Lodge et al., 1989) a simple voting rule of positive minus negative considerations about a party (Kelley and Mirer, 1974) or other schema-based heuristics like endorsements, viability and candidate appearances (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk, 2001: 953). The logic behind the voter centric brand concept is similar to these heuristics since it provides a cognitive short cut for electoral decision-making. Nonetheless, it is also different from them in two important ways relating to how political information is processed: (i) What is the primary goal of information processing—to form evaluations or to learn? (ii) What is the level of cognitive effort invested—to engage in effortful processing or to engage in less effortful processing? (See Huang and Price, 2001: 669)

First, a brand voter is premised on a *memory-based* model of information processing, where voters aim at learning about parties when confronted with political messages (e.g. Zaller and Feldman, 1992). In contrast, an online-based model of information processing, which some of the outlined heuristics implicitly subscribe to, highlights that voters aim to instantly form an evaluation (e.g. Lodge et al., 1989; Kam, 2005). This is not the case for brand voters. Rather, they use the party brand like birds building nests. Voters collect pieces of information they encounter in their daily lives, ranging from attitudes to atmospheres, and store this fragmented knowledge in their memory nest in order to learn about a particular party (French and Smith, 2010). And when called upon to make a decision, voters retrieve their different associations from long-term memory in order to render a summary judgment. The online-based model, on the other hand, assumes that voters keep a judgment tally of different political parties, and this tally is updated immediately when confronted with new information. This is, for example, true for the motivated reasoner. He evaluates information based on cognitive consistency; motivated to discard information that is damaging toward his preferred party.

Second, a brand voter is premised on *careless information processing*, as opposed to a more careful absorption of input. This distinction might seem misplaced here, since all heuristics are rooted on a somewhat modest cognitive engagement. Even though this is true, this distinction involves a crucial relative difference (Druckman et al., 2009: 497; Huang and Price, 2001). For example, the heuristics outlined by Lodge et al. (1989) and Kelley and Mirer (1974) can be considered more cognitively demanding than the operations of the brand voter, particularly because the impression-driven heuristic by Lodge et al. (1989) implies: “both a systematic and elaborated method of message processing,” as Huang and Price (2001: 670) conclude. Equally, Kelley and Mirer’s (1974: 589) heuristic, or mental program as they term it, has been characterized as: “too cognitively taxing, relying on the effortful retrieval of specific information from long-term memory.” (Lodge et al., 1989: 401). Both examples rely on a strict decision rule compared to the processing expectations of the brand voter. It means that the brand voter is, what could be termed, an unmotivated learner. His state of mind is more floating and open, simply seeking to smell what is happening around him without

always thinking about making a decision on the spot that needs to fit a certain perceptual scheme (French and Smith, 2010: 447).

In sum, the voter centric brand heuristic is the result of a voter which employs (i) memory-based information processing by collecting diverse pieces of associations (ii), which are drawn from his unmotivated learning regarding political parties. These two features underline, as we argued above, that the brand voter is amenable to changes in the political landscape as he lacks a focused perceptual scheme for viewing politics. He is at the outset agnostic with regards to what associative material is collected, and as a result will have an inclination to follow the ups and downs of parties in the political arena.

### 3. The voter centric political brand and models of voting behavior

The word brand is sometimes used in the field of voting behavior to illustrate long-standing political science concepts. Party identification has, for instance, been described in terms of brand loyalty (Hopkin and Paolucci, 1999: 308) and issue ownership as a strategic positioning of the party image in the electoral market (Geys, 2012: 406; Kitschelt, 1993: 311). Even though these are metaphors, the semantic use of the brand notion in extant literature, begs the question: is the voter centric political brand concept simply old wine on new bottles. Put differently, does the brand mechanism outlined in the first hypothesis merely mirror something we already account for and measure in studies of voting behavior? In this section, we argue that the political brand is conceptually distinct. Not just from other heuristics, but also from three prevalent models of voting behavior<sup>2</sup>: Cleavage voting, party identification voting and issue ownership voting.

These models only cover a part of the theoretical spectrum in voting behavior research. Even so, they are singled out because they are most likely to be confounded with the voter centric brand. Two reasons for this should be mentioned.

On an empirical level these three models are prone to co-vary – at least somewhat – with the political brand. If you identify with a party or find it especially competent

<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge at least two limitations of this selection of voting models. First, each of the three voting models is a composite of several related approaches; however, limitations of space have necessitated a focus on the common denominator directed by the classics. Second, the selection of the three voting models is based on contextual, theoretical and methodological grounds. Contextually, in Danish politics and Danish Election Studies these three voting models are among the most employed and successful frameworks capturing the vote choice (e.g. Andersen et al., 2007). Theoretically, the three voting models seem to cover diverse intellectual roots and are used widely on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean when broadly summarizing the great debate in the field of voting behavior (e.g. Converse, 2006). Methodologically, when testing a new explanatory variable, fewer and more carefully selected control variables may be preferable because the researcher retains more detailed management over how the effects of a given variable is related to another. As Christopher Achen puts it: “with more than three independent variables, no one can do the careful data analysis to ensure that the model specification is accurate and that the assumptions fit as well as the researcher claims” (Achen, 2002: 446).



with regards to a specific issue, you will, presumably, tend to have a positive associative network attached to this party.

On a conceptual level these voting models all stem from a sociological or social psychological background. They are thus similar to the voter centric brand concept in that they expect voters to imbue political parties with a certain valence tag. In this vein, all the models would expect that the assessment of any party's concrete policy or performance to be heavily colored by how the voter is predisposed to evaluate the party. The difference between the models lies in why voters are predisposed towards a party: whether it is due to a cleavage, an identification, an issue ownership or a brand. This is in opposition to more rational models such as directional or economic voting (e.g. Fiorina, 1981), which expect voters to act on the actual content of policies and performance. Not necessarily how it is packaged.

In spite of these similarities, which warrant the need for further comparison, we believe that the voter centric brand is conceptually distinct from cleavage, party identification and issue-ownership voting in important ways: namely in the content of information voters search for and how it is processed.

Clearly, cleavage voting, party identification voting, issue ownership voting and brand voting differ in the content of information voters elicit. The relevant content for a *cleavage* voter is based on an activation of a political predisposition stemming from his daily life. It could be related to his class or religion, which then prompts absorption of information on this account (Herstein, 1981: 844). In *party identification* voting any political message is understood in terms of party affiliation, since the perceived closeness between party and voter is given primacy. That is, the voter will first and foremost look for a party cue when he is early in the search process (Campbell et al., 1960; Lau, 1995). An *issue-ownership* voter processes the parties' problem-solving capacity one issue at a time (Petrocik, 1996: 826). In this way the issue that is under consideration at any given time is decided by what is at the top of the media's agenda (Budge and Farlie, 1983: 24). Finally, the *brand* voter searches more broadly. He stores fragments of associations which he picks up from public sentiments circulating around different parties – and then tie this information together in an associative network to convey an overall picture of each party.

However, in spite of these differences, the assumptions about information content and information processing across the three *existing* models are remarkably similar. In extant literature voters primarily concentrate on one aspect of politics (i.e. cleavages, identifications or issues), and disregard information, which does not fit into this perceptual scheme. This contrasts with the brand voter, who aims to soak up bits and pieces of information based on public sentiments when creating associative networks. There is no particular information content to zoom in on. There is no particular order in the brand voter's information search.

This might seem like a trivial difference. What does it matter, that the brand voter has no specific content focus or search order in his adoption of political information? It matters as it leads to substantially diverse predictions about electoral stability. Since voters' perceptions of

cleavages, identifications and issue ownerships do not readily change – and, as a consequences, neither do voters' electoral preferences (though cleavage and identification arguably are relatively more stable than issue ownership). That is, the axiomatic focused search pattern embedded in these classic voting models leads to a steadiness in the voter's predispositions, which result in a comparatively stable vote choice. By contrast, the brand voter is taking cues from many sources floating in the public realm that will often invite electoral instability. This distinctiveness of the voter centric brand concept identified above leads to the second and final hypothesis:

*H2. Higher (or lower) levels of political brand value attached to a party will manifest in a higher (or lower) propensity to vote for the same party, also after controlling for variables such as cleavage voting, party identification voting and issue ownership voting.*

#### 4. Research design: context, data and measures

In order to test our two outlined hypotheses, we need to describe the present study's context, data and measures of the associative networks underlying party brands along with control variables.

##### 4.1. Context

This paper presents a two-wave panel survey that was conducted in Denmark during the spring of 2010 and the spring of 2012. Denmark is a Western European country with proportional representation and a parliamentary system which usually has seven to eight parties. The left-right continuum is still the dominant cleavage in Danish politics, and this has not changed even though a decrease in party identification and an increase in electoral volatility have occurred (Andersen et al., 2007).

Denmark is a relevant case for a couple of reasons. First, although Denmark might not have a broader interest, it is a *multiparty system*, in contrast to England and the United States, where the majority of research on political brands has been undertaken. Second, Denmark is a hard case concerning *branded politics* since the parties in Scandinavian countries are not considered market-oriented toward voters to the same extent as in other nations (Strömbäck, 2007: 79). Overall, Denmark is not a unique example; however, it seems to be a relevant and tough case to make the first quantitative investigation of the effects of political brands on voters.

Below we focus on two of the eight parties, which were in the parliament during the period under investigation—namely, the two largest parties fighting for the Prime Minister position: the Liberal party and the Social Democratic party. Both had similar, albeit inverse trajectories between the two waves of the panel study. In the spring of 2010 the Social Democrats were in opposition and were thought of as one of the parties with momentum, whilst the Liberal party played the role of the Prime Minister party in a struggling government coalition. Two years later, this pattern was reversed. The Social Democrats was in government, but the Liberal party had momentum in the opposition. This change in the perceived momentum of the parties seems like a windfall because we should then have a

decent amount of variation in the political brand value attached to these parties.

#### 4.2. Data

A sample of 2251 individuals from an online panel was recruited to participate in the two-wave panel survey. The sample was approximately representative of the Danish population.<sup>3</sup> In the first wave the participants' political brand value was measured for the seven largest parties in the Danish parliament. As the measurement method was quite extensive (see below) each respondent only associated about three of the seven different parties. This resulted in split samples with more than 500 respondents for each party. 1268 of the original 2251 respondents participated in the second wave of the survey. Here, all respondents were asked to make associations about only two parties: the Social Democratic party and the Liberal party. This was done in order to get a sufficiently large number of respondents who had associated about the same party in both 2010 and 2012. The survey produced a large amount of associative data; in fact over 15,000 associations were elicited from the respondents. Moreover, a host of questions in closed categories about socio-demographics, issues, ideologies and so forth were asked in both surveys. Data and surveys can be acquired by contacting the authors.

#### 4.3. Measure I: political brand value

Political brand value was measured by an associative exercise in which the respondents were asked to associate freely about a party.<sup>4</sup> They were given two minutes for each party. The respondents' associations could take the form of either a word or a sentence, but ten boxes were outlined in

order to clarify the point at which one association stopped and another started. For instance, this resulted in a voter associating about one of the parties: "Young leadership", "Has become too populist", "Red" and "A party in crisis". These associations were then used to create a composite measure of political brand value, defined earlier as the value added (or subtracted) to a political offering by attaching a brand name to it.

In the voter centric political brand perspective, there is broad agreement about how to understand what a valuable brand is (Schneider, 2004: 42; French and Smith, 2010: 467). It implies a brand having *strong*, *favorable* and *unique* associations. However, the agreement stops when it comes to different qualitative ways of measuring the associations based on, for instance, projective techniques or mental maps (Keller, 1993: 12; Krishnan, 1996: 391; John et al., 2006: 555). In any case, the endeavor here was different, as noted. We utilized the associations in a way that was compatible with a quantitative analysis (Nielsen, 2013), something that is needed if one wishes to connect the brand concept to the existing literature on voting behavior:

- *Strength* is related to the number of associations the voter attaches to the political brand. Specifically, strength was measured as having a positive, yet diminishing relationship, with the number of associations one had about a party. The first association therefore added  $1/1 = 1$  to the respondents' strength score, the second association  $1/2 = 0.5$ , the third association  $1/4 = 0.25$ , the fourth association  $1/8 = 0.125$ , and so on. This relationship signified how associative networks are structured. That is, associations stored closer to the center of the respondent's associative network matter more than associations which are peripheral (Krishnan, 1996: 392). As an example, if one had three associations, the respondent would get a strength score of  $1 + 0.5 + 0.25 = 1.75$ .
- *Favorability* is defined by the valence that the respondents themselves attach to their associations (Keller, 1993). It means that the respondents, without being told in advance, had to rate each association as positive, negative or neutral after the free association task. To exemplify, if a respondent had two negative associations and one positive, then she would receive a favorability score of  $1 - 2 = -1$ .
- *Uniqueness* is defined by the diversity of the associations, inferring that brands which have a diverse set of associations have a better foundation for being thought of as unique. This follows from the idea in marketing research that having associations on a number of different service attributes makes it more likely that the service stands out in comparison to others (Krishnan, 1996). To determine how diverse a brand was, the pool of associations was coded into five content-based categories plus one "others" category inspired by the NES survey (see Appendix 1). Taking the number of different categories the respondent associated in and dividing this number by the total number of associations derive uniqueness. For example, if one respondent had three associations, which belong in three different categories, such as: "good leader", "bad tax

<sup>3</sup> The respondents were recruited in order to approximate a random sample. This was to some extent successful. On region the sample was representative. The sample was fairly representative on age and gender, respondents being on average four years older and four percent more likely to be male. Furthermore, among our respondents, more had completed further education and fewer had completed only basic school education. However, to be absolutely sure that a bias in this sample was not present, the average marginal brand effects were computed at different levels of age and education as well as for men and women. Neither showed a systematic or significant pattern.

<sup>4</sup> This associative task is different from, but related to, the open-ended like and dislikes questions in, for instance, the National Election Survey (NES) in the United States. In particular, Kelley and Mirer (1974) employed the NES data in their model of "the simple act of voting"; however, there are many key differences compared to the outlined brand measure in this article. The primary difference between their measure and the brand measure is that an associative analysis is not structured in two boxes of like and dislike considerations but is rather structured in a set of empty boxes. Secondly, the aim of the associative task is to extract a personal stream of consciousness, in contrast to establishing an interview setting between two persons. It implies that the probe in this brand study specifically wants to capture top of mind associations in its broadest sense, while the NES questioning is specifically encapsulating "considerations", defined in this context by Zaller and Feldman (1992: 585): "as a reason for favoring one side of an issue rather than another." Finally, the associative network structure of the respondent is trying to be captured in the outlined brand measure by making the respondent's first association count more than the last one and including a uniqueness indicator; again, this network structure is not part of, for instance, Kelley and Mirer's measure.

policy” and “mundane”; this respondent would get a uniqueness score of  $3/3 = 1$ .

To finally establish the quantitative measure of political brand value (PBV), we had to integrate the above three components in a composite measure.<sup>5</sup> Two considerations were made.

First, the effects of both strength and uniqueness are contingent on whether one has favorable or unfavorable brand associations. For people with negative associations, uniqueness and strength will form a clear negative impression. On the other hand, for people with positive associations, uniqueness and strength will form a clear positive impression. To model this insight, favorability interacts with both strength and uniqueness (See Keller, 1993: 11f). Political brand value of party  $j$  is consequently expressed as strength ( $S$ ) multiplied by uniqueness ( $U$ ) multiplied by favorability ( $F$ ):

$$PBV_j = S_j \times U_j \times F_j$$

Second, to give the political brand value a simple interpretation, it varies between  $-5$  and  $+5$ , making it a 10-point scale. The value of  $-5$  indicates that the respondent attaches the maximum number of exclusively negative associations to just one category relating to a party. At the other end of the spectrum, the value of  $+5$  indicates that a respondent attaches the maximum number of exclusively positive associations to five different categories relating to a party (Nielsen, 2013).

#### 4.4. Measure II: control variables

In addition to measuring political brand value, the survey also included a number of control variables: *Cleavage voting*, *party identification voting* and *issue ownership voting*.

First, *cleavages* were empirically translated into the socioeconomic situation of the respondent, as it has often been

done in the empirical analysis of cleavage theory in Denmark (Stubager, 2003: 377) and elsewhere (Kriesi, 1998).

Second, in line with the conceptualization of *party identification* in this article, the measure extracts the perceived closeness between the parties and the voter (e.g. Barnes et al., 1988; Johnston, 2006; Marsh, 2006). Hence, in the present survey, the respondents were asked how close they were to different parties. They placed themselves and where they perceived the political parties to be situated on a scale, so closeness was reversed to create a party identification variable ranging from 0 (maximum distance) to 10 (no distance). This type of measure is different from the US-based measures but related to the party identification measures used in many European countries (for an extensive review on various party identification measures and the differences in structure/wording among western countries, see Johnston, 2006).

Third, *issue ownership* was measured by asking the voters whether a Social Democratic or a Liberal-Conservative government would be preferred to handle a particular issue. This question wording is in sync with the Danish National Election Survey (e.g. Andersen et al., 2007) and international measures on issue ownership voting (Aardal and Van Wijnen, 2005). However, it can be argued in this case that an issue ownership estimate of each party would be more suitable, since political brands are measured on a party-by-party level. This type of data is, on the other hand, not common in Danish surveys on issue ownership because political parties in the parliament are usually clearly aligned behind one of the two coalitions. We therefore use the coalitions as a basis for assessing the prospective evaluation of different issues in this study, as it is commonly understood that attitudes toward the issues will be structured around these coalitions (e.g. Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011). Issue ownership was assessed on four different issue areas spanning a variety of policy domains, including those issues voters thought to be the most important at the time of data collection, namely the economy and immigration (Madsen, 2010).

## 5. Empirical findings and analysis

In this section, we find evidence for both of the proposed hypotheses. Specifically, we find a strong and significant effect of political brand value on voting behavior, which is also robust when confronted with relevant control variables.

Before we lay out these results a couple methodological choices warrant mention. First, we concentrate, as outlined, on two parties: the Social Democrats and the Liberal party. These two parties were the sole focus of the second wave of the panel survey, and accordingly, we have the largest number of observations regarding political brand value (PBV) for these two parties. Second, we use a binary logit model with random effects to estimate the influence PBV has on who the voters intended to vote for if a parliamentary election were held tomorrow. A random effects approach was chosen, as fixed effects estimation would imply omitting respondents who did not change their party preferences within the two panels. As such, we simply pool the two-way panel and use it “as if” it was cross-sectional,

<sup>5</sup> Since this outlined brand measure is an unconventional variable in voting studies, it is prudent to address particularly one important critique to this measure. The critique concerns whether the collected associations actually measure any independent variation in the voter's perception of the political party. One might suggest that by using the free association exercise, we will only capture the residual of the other voting models. If a voter for example makes associations about “tax policy” and afterward labels it as a negative association, one could argue that we have just measured the fact that this person's view on tax policy diverges from that of the party he associated about. We control for this specific critique later by including people's issue positions in an empirical model, and we do not find support of this assessment. However, the fundamental idea behind this presented critique is broader in scope because it confronts the very nature of brand effects. That is, even though a voter's position on an issue (such as tax cuts for the wealthy) may influence which associations the voter decides to store about a political party, voters who share the same issue position oftentimes vary systematically in how this issue plays a role in their knowledge structures (Lau, 1995; Curran et al., 2009: 18–21). Although two parties share the same commitment to cutting taxes, one party may have this chiseled into their brand, whereas the other party might only have installed a few “tax cut associations” in the minds of voters (French and Smith, 2010). Overall, the point is that associations do not, per se, sum up issue positions (or party identification for that matter), despite the fact that they might refer to them. Rather, associations function as an independent mechanism coupling memory and judgment (Srull and Wyer, 1989), as described earlier when we conceptualized the brand voting model.



while taking any serial correlation into account when estimating the error term. Finally, we use a model with a binary rather than nominal dependent variable to measure vote choice. This is done as we have a PBV score for each party, and introducing both into a single multinomial model would produce unnecessary multicollinearity.

### 5.1. Hypothesis 1: the link between political brand value and voting

The first hypothesis posited that a higher level of PBV attached to a party would manifest itself in a higher propensity to vote for this party on Election Day.

To test this Table 1 presents the results of a logistic regression of political brand value on vote choice, where the intercept is allowed to vary across the two survey-waves. As can be seen from the model, the PBV assigned to a party is significantly correlated with voting for this party. Since logistic models imply a nonmonotonic effect of PBV on the propensity to vote, the logit coefficient is not easily interpretable. The average marginal effect reported next to the coefficient has a more intuitive interpretation. It can be understood as the increase in the average probability of voting for a party that one will expect if all respondents increased their PBV scores by one. Some voters will be affected more, some less, but the average effect across respondents will be equal to the average marginal effect. Both models show a substantial effect of political brand value on voting behavior, which strongly support hypothesis one.

### 5.2. Hypothesis 2: the path from political brand value to voting

Hypothesis 2 stated that PBV had an effect on voting also when holding the influence of cleavages, party identification and issue ownership voting constant. This is tested in Tables 2 and 3.

In the first four columns of Table 2 *cleavage voting* is introduced. The results illuminate that the PBV coefficient remains practically unchanged after controlling for the cleavage voting variables.

In columns five through eight we turn to *party identification voting*. As was evident with cleavage voting, the inclusion of party identification voting does not substantially diminish the estimated effect of brand voting.

**Table 1**

The effect of political brand value (PBV).

	Liberal party		Social democratic party	
	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.
PBV	1.51** (0.20)	0.16** (0.01)	1.46** (0.19)	0.15** (0.01)
Second survey-wave (2012)	0.14 (0.22)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.21)	0.00 (0.02)
Constant	−2.17** (0.48)		−1.69** (0.42)	
Log likelihood	−481		−432	
Observations	1210	1210	1204	1204

Voter-clustered standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Turning to Table 3, we introduce four predominant issues to control for *issue ownership voting*. While controlling for issue ownership voting reduces the explanatory power of political brands substantially, the average marginal effect remains strongly significant.<sup>6</sup>

To put the estimated effect in perspective Fig. 1 juxtaposes the effect of PBV with the effects of two other voting models by plotting the predicted probabilities for voting for the Social Democrats or the Liberal party at different levels of issue ownership of the economy, party identification and PBV. Among other things, the data shows that if a respondent perceives that the Social Democratic party gains issue ownership of the economy (one of the important issues in Danish politics) this roughly translates into the same percentage point increase in probability of voting for the Social Democrats, as an increase in PBV from zero to one. In general, the result documents that PBV can compete with these major political science variables.

To conclude, the second hypothesis—which proposes that PBV has an independent effect on voting behavior—finds support in the data. This finding is interesting, especially because research has not yet been conducted with a representative sample documenting a relationship between party brands and voting behavior.

### 5.3. The robustness of the finding: stress tests of the brand–behavior correlation

Having estimated a significant effect of increasing PBV on voting for the Social Democrats and the Liberal party, respectively, we turn to how robust this finding is. We investigate:

- (1) Whether the brand–behavior correlation seems to be a result of the parties (the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party) being tested?
- (2) Whether the effect is robust to removing unit specific heterogeneity (fixed-effects)?
- (3) Whether the brand–behavior correlation is only present among “typomaniacs”?
- (4) Whether the theoretically derived computation of PBV is superior to other specifications?

Below, each test is shortly described. Overall, these four stress tests document the robustness of this article's basic finding that PBV is strongly and significantly related to voting behavior.

(1) To investigate whether the brand effect only relates to the Social Democrats and the Liberal party, the final specification used in Table 3 were applied to three additional parties (The three largest parties in the parliament in 2010 after the Liberal party and The Social Democrats: The

<sup>6</sup> We also introduced a different specification of issue voting, namely ideological orientation. This did not change the estimated effects substantially.

**Table 2**

The effect of political brand value with controls I.

	Liberal party		Social democratic party		Liberal party		Social democratic party	
	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.
PBV	1.43** (0.19)	0.16** (0.01)	1.44** (0.19)	0.15** (0.01)	1.43** (0.19)	0.16** (0.01)	1.46** (0.19)	0.15** (0.01)
Age (years)	0.08 (0.05)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.05)	0.00 (0.00)	0.08 (0.05)	0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.05)	0.00 (0.00)
Age squared	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Private sector	0.19 (0.23)	0.02 (0.03)	0.07 (0.21)	0.01 (0.02)	0.19 (0.23)	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.21)	0.00 (0.02)
<i>Education (ref: public school)</i>								
High school	–0.20 (0.48)	–0.02 (0.05)	–0.37 (0.44)	–0.04 (0.05)	–0.20 (0.48)	–0.02 (0.05)	–0.37 (0.44)	–0.04 (0.05)
Vocational school	0.44 (0.35)	0.05 (0.04)	–0.43 (0.34)	–0.05 (0.04)	0.44 (0.35)	0.05 (0.04)	–0.45 (0.34)	–0.05 (0.04)
Shorter cycle tert.	–0.20 (0.35)	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.43 (0.34)	–0.05 (0.04)	–0.20 (0.35)	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.46 (0.34)	–0.05 (0.04)
Long cycle tertiary	–0.36 (0.40)	–0.04 (0.04)	–0.40 (0.37)	–0.04 (0.04)	–0.36 (0.40)	–0.04 (0.04)	–0.42 (0.37)	–0.04 (0.04)
Income (ca. \$20k/y)	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.00)	0.07+ (0.04)	0.01+ (0.00)	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.00)	0.07 (0.04)	0.01+ (0.00)
Male (ref: female)	–0.12 (0.21)	–0.01 (0.02)	–0.19 (0.20)	–0.02 (0.02)	–0.12 (0.21)	–0.01 (0.02)	–0.18 (0.20)	–0.02 (0.02)
Party identification					–0.00 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.00)	0.05 (0.05)	0.01 (0.00)
Second survey-wave (2012)	–4.54** (1.36)		–1.93+ (1.17)		–4.49** (1.46)		–2.40+ (1.27)	
Constant	0.09 (0.21)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.21)	0.00 (0.02)	0.08 (0.23)	0.01 (0.03)	0.05 (0.22)	0.01 (0.02)
Log likelihood	–466		–426		–466		–425	
Observations	1210	1210	1204	1204	1210	1210	1204	1204

Voter-clustered standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Socialist People's party, The Danish People's party and The Conservative party). As can be seen from surveying Table 4 the effect of PBV on voting was statistically significant across all five parties.

Note that the small samples used to estimate the effect are a result of only employing 2010 data. The reason for only utilizing this data is that the political brand value of the three smaller parties were only measured in 2010. One feature of the 2010 estimates should be highlighted. The effects seem to be substantially smaller which might indicate some temporal variation in the influence of political brands; simply that brands matter more in certain contexts. Yet, readers should be careful about reading too much into these comparative results, as the estimated effects have considerable sample variability.

(2) One may question, whether simply controlling for prevalent political science variables, as we do in Table 3, makes it possible to identify a causal effect of political brand value. Specifically, there are a number of unobservable variables such as personality and intelligence, which may influence both brand value and vote choice. Further,

even though we enter a substantial set of controls, these controls are all subject to some measurement error. Accordingly, it is possible that the explanatory power of PBV stems from seeping up random measurement error of the other variables. To try and address this critique, we estimated a moderated version of the model from Table 4 with voter fixed effects. It means, we omitted the cleavage voting variables, which were constant across the two time periods, and therefore included in the fixed effect. We also excluded the unemployment issue-ownership because it was extremely correlated with the general economy issue-ownership in the smaller sample.

The results are shown in the first row of Table 5. They demonstrate a virtually unchanged effect of PBV on vote choice. While this fixed effects estimation provides further evidence that political brands actually do influence voting behavior, it does not rule out all confounding factors. Readers should also note the rather small sample used to estimate the model. Just above a hundred observations. The reason for this dramatic reduction in sample size is that voters who did not alter their vote choice between 2010

**Table 3**

The effect of political brand value with controls II.

	Liberal party		Social democratic party	
	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.
PBV	0.91** (0.15)	0.09** (0.01)	0.85** (0.19)	0.08** (0.01)
Age (years)	0.08+ (0.05)	0.01+ (0.00)	0.06 (0.05)	0.01 (0.00)
Age squared	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Private sector	0.32 (0.23)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.23)	0.00 (0.02)
<i>Education (ref: public school)</i>				
High School	–0.09 (0.46)	–0.01 (0.05)	–0.69 (0.50)	–0.06 (0.04)
Vocational school	0.42 (0.34)	0.04 (0.03)	–0.60 (0.40)	–0.05 (0.04)
Shorter cycle tert.	–0.17 (0.34)	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.61 (0.41)	–0.06 (0.04)
Long cycle tertiary	–0.33 (0.39)	–0.03 (0.04)	–0.66 (0.43)	–0.06 (0.04)
Income (ca. \$20k/y)	–0.03 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.00)	0.05 (0.05)	0.00 (0.00)
Male (ref: female)	0.03 (0.20)	0.00 (0.02)	–0.30 (0.23)	–0.03 (0.02)
Party identification	0.17** (0.05)	0.02** (0.00)	0.14* (0.06)	0.01** (0.01)
<i>Issue ownership of...</i>				
Economy	1.07** (0.27)	0.11** (0.02)	2.78** (0.49)	0.25** (0.03)
Unemployment	0.72* (0.29)	0.07** (0.03)	0.86** (0.30)	0.08** (0.02)
Immigration	–0.04 (0.24)	–0.00 (0.03)	0.35 (0.23)	0.03 (0.02)
Caring for the elderly	1.31** (0.30)	0.14** (0.03)	–0.11 (0.25)	–0.01 (0.02)
Second survey-wave (2012)	–7.89** (1.69)		–6.44** (1.73)	
Constant	0.40 (0.25)	0.04 (0.03)	0.46+ (0.26)	0.04+ (0.02)
Log likelihood	–410		–352	
Observations	1210	1210	1204	1204

Voter-clustered standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

and 2012 cannot be included when doing fixed effects estimation. Even so, the fixed effects estimation does lend additional credence to the established link between PBV and voting.

(3) The PBV measure is based on people making free associations about different parties—both in their own minds and on paper. This translation process from associating in the mind to doing so on paper can potentially create a bias. One concern is that “typomaniacs”, arguably more sophisticated users of the Internet accustomed to writing blogs and using social media, write their innermost thoughts, whereas others clam up, writing only a few words. To test whether this divide may be biasing the above

correlation, we engaged in two tests. First, the cross-party average number of associations was included as a control. While this increased the standard errors of PBV somewhat, it did not significantly change the effect of the party brand. Second, it was investigated whether the marginal effect of the brand changed across different levels of written associations. This comparison of “typomaniacs” and “clams” did not present any indication of systematic or significant biases (see the second, third and fourth row of Table 5).

(4) PBV is an interaction between the strength, favorability and uniqueness of voters' associations. This relationship was derived from the theory underlying the voter-centric political brand (Keller, 1993). Therefore, it seems like an appropriate stress test of the theoretical connection between brand and behavior to investigate whether this three-way interaction actually carries any distinct empirical explanatory power. In order to do so, we examined the three-way interaction alongside other functional relationships of strength, favorability and uniqueness. The conclusion was that while other functional forms also presented a correlation with voting behavior, the theoretically derived three-way interaction expressed in PBV consistently showed an independent and strong effect on voting behavior. An example of this can be seen from the final row of Table 5, which presents the effect of PBV, controlling for an additive functional competitor (Strength + Favorability + Uniqueness).

## 6. Conclusion

The idea of utilizing marketing concepts in electoral research is not new. On the contrary, Lazarsfeld (1969: 192), one of the founding fathers of studies on voting behavior and in fact a veteran marketer, wrote in his memoir that he had already, as a young socialist in Austria, observed: “... the methodological equivalence of socialist voting and the buying of soap...”. Equally Kirchheimer (1966) argued that branding is an inevitable reaction to the shift from mass parties to catch-all parties. He concluded that a modern party that will win elections: “... must have entered into millions of minds as a familiar object fulfilling in politics a role analogous to that of a major brand in the marketing of a universally needed and highly standardized article of mass consumption” (Kirchheimer, 1966: 192).

Despite these assessments, relatively little research is concerned with uncovering the explanatory potential of brands in voting behavior. The goal of this article has therefore been to explore this potential link between party brands and electoral politics. To summarize the results of this study, the article shows a correlation between brand and behavior (supporting H1), underscoring the fact that voters who exhibit a high political brand value (PBV) for a particular party also have a high propensity to vote for that party. Furthermore, this documented pattern remains significant after controlling for three historically relevant variables: cleavage voting, party identification voting and issue ownership voting (supporting H2).

To be sure, this article raises more questions than it answers because we have possibly carved out an alternative research agenda. Here, we can only mention a couple of them.

First, additional research that replicates the results of this analysis will be of great value in testing reliability and

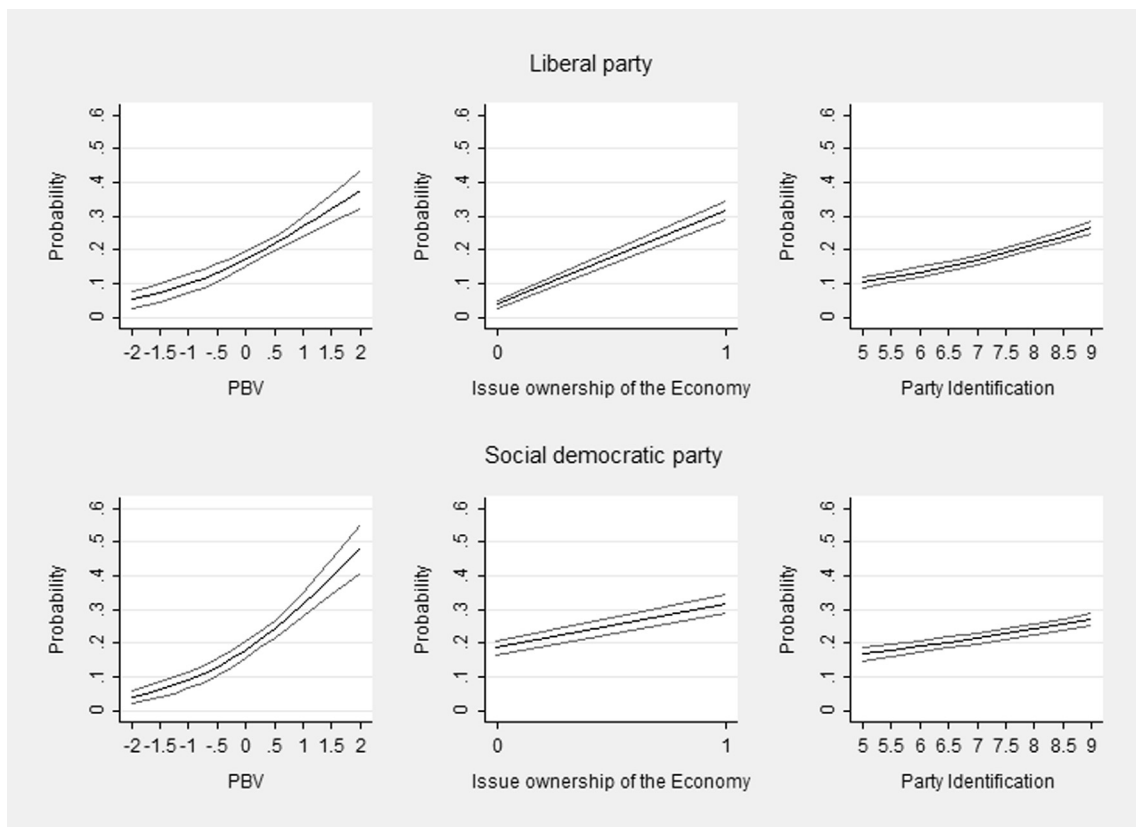


Fig. 1. Probability of voting for a party across different variables.

comparing different countries over time to corroborate these findings.

Second, the study presents a rich amount of qualitative data, which in future research should be better employed and integrated within a broader framework. For instance, leveraging voters' association to illuminate voters' memory clusters and discern their political meaning constructions. This will make it possible to study the voter-centric brand in a more dynamic setting. Specifically, it would be interesting to trace how public sentiments develop and solidify in the associative networks of the electorate. An approach, that is essential to help enlighten whether some of the assumptions made in the conceptual part of the article are accurate: namely, whether the search patterns of the brand voter are as broad and fluctuating as posited. That is an endeavor, which the rather static nature of a quantitative survey analysis is not well suited for.

Third, future studies should also focus more deliberately on the issue of causality, even though it is not a problem related solely to the explanatory potential of political brands. Indeed, the issue of causality is relevant to all theories on voting; it is nevertheless imperative for researchers to determine if a firmer connection can be established between brand and behavior. To do so we need to go further than simply controlling for other relevant variables when searching for causal order in the electoral universe (Page and Jones, 1979; Markus and Converse, 1979; Bartels, 2010). Otherwise, we will be forced to follow old orthodoxies and assumptions, rather than giving all variables an equal footing in explaining voting behavior. In other words, the goal is to unravel the possible independent impact of party brands by conducting *qualitative* case studies, experiments and process tracing or employing *quantitative* survey experiments.

**Table 4**  
The effect of political brand value across different parties (2010).

	Social democratic party		Socialist party		Liberal party		Conservative party		Danish people's party	
	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.
PBV	0.43*	0.04*	0.83**	0.09**	0.63**	0.04**	0.98**	0.05**	1.31**	0.06**
	(0.18)	(0.02)	(0.19)	(0.02)	(0.19)	(0.01)	(0.25)	(0.01)	(0.25)	(0.01)
Log likelihood	–92		–117		–74		–63		–59	
Observations	313		357	357	341	341	353	353	368	368

Voter-clustered standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 5**  
Robustness tests.

	Liberal party		Social democratic party	
	Logit	A.M.E.	Logit	A.M.E.
PBV, fixed effects	0.92* (0.47)	0.11* (0.04)	1.24** (0.44)	0.10* (0.05)
PBV, controlling for no. of associations	0.90** (0.10)	0.10** (0.01)	0.88** (0.11)	0.10** (0.01)
PBV, clams at two associations		0.10** (0.01)		0.08** (0.01)
PBV, typomaniacs at eight associations		0.09** (0.01)		0.07** (0.01)
PBV, alternative specification	0.97** (0.16)	0.10** (0.02)	0.93** (0.17)	0.09** (0.01)
Observations	1210 (112)		1204 (120)	

Voter-clustered standard errors in parentheses.

The observations in parenthesis are for the fixed effects model.

+*p* < 0.10, \**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01.

Finally, the empirical work on voting behavior in this article also yields a theoretical mapping of the microphysics of voters related to their way of coping with the different lenses through which politics can be viewed. For example, from a voter's point of view: can a brand optic mediate the effects of his party identification? Whilst the field of voting behavior has had a keen empirical focus on a scientific dialog that has powerfully refined existing concepts and results, less attention has been devoted to theoretically integrating these different perspectives, such as cleavage voting, party identification voting, issue ownership voting or brand voting. Overall, this indicates that future research efforts could concentrate on determining the conditions under which different voting models are best suited to explain the outlook of the individual voter.

## Appendix 1. Coding categories

The selection of the following 5 + 1 content categories was primarily taken from the NES open-ended coding categories in the United States (e.g. Redlawsk, 2001). Furthermore, it is qualified by (i) a pilot study using 175 undergraduate students to assess the concrete applicability, (ii) a group of five experts from the University of Copenhagen that could contextualize the coding categories, (iii) and finally, theoretical expectations about voting behavior, parties and political marketing drawn from the international political science literature.

*Affect*: Associations about the emotions, values and feelings a party can elicit such as “evil”, “cool”, “a nice party”, “naive world-view” and “cynical attitudes toward humans”.

*Issue*: Associations regarding concrete policies, problems or solutions, such as “lower taxes”, “a tough immigration policy”, “a stimulus package”, “rising unemployment” and “waiting lists in hospitals”.

*Hoopla*: Associations that concern media management or evaluate party performance in the parliamentary arena, the electoral arena and in the internal party arena, such as

“spin”, “skilled media handling”, “unrest in the party” and “strong collaboration with other parties”.

*Ideology*: Associations relating to the historical or symbolical background of the party, such as “socialism”, “conservative ideology”, “nationalism” and “labor unions”.

*Person*: Associations regarding the party leader or other persons, such as “Thorning-Schmidt”, “Fogh”, “Michael Laudrup” and “Jason Watt”.

*Other*: Associations that do not fit into any of the above categories.

Concerning inter-coder reliability, two coders independently coded the associations into the 5 + 1 categories. After completing the coding process, 300 respondents were chosen to assess the degree of inter-coder reliability. The two initial coders each coded 150 respondents who had already been processed by the other coder. Calculating Krippendorff's alpha provided a result within the range of what is considered acceptable (Krippendorff's alpha = 0.87).

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